

Character Education

Character is:

Knowing the good – desiring the good – doing the good!

We first must know what is right (this is not always as clear as you might think). But we must care deeply about what is right and have the desire to follow that path. Then we must – do it! Even in the face of pressure from outside and temptations from within we must do what is right.

As parents and teacher we do not want to merely teach individual virtues commonly seen as components of character education but we want to help and guide young people to construct a “personal vision” of themselves as “good people” and then live up to that vision by placing good behaviors in their everyday life. It is easy to live in a world where poor character is so commonplace that we “do it because everybody else does it that way”. But we can make personal choices that set us apart. So as we enter our adolescent year’s; the “formative years,” where we begin to make personal choices about who we are and who we want to become, it is an important time to look at these virtues of character.

Principles of Character

- 1. Your character is defined by what you do – not by what you say or believe.**
- 2. Every choice you make helps define the kind of person you are choosing to be.**
- 3. Good character requires doing the “right” thing even when it is costly or risky.**
- 4. You do not have to “go along with the crowd,” you can choose to be better.**
- 5. What you do matters, and one person can make a big difference in the world.**

The payoff for good character is that it makes you a better person, and it makes our community and the world a better place to live.

Six pillars of character education:

Trustworthiness

Responsibility

Respect

Caring

Fairness

Citizenship

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness means:

- Keeping promises (being a person of your word)
- Being reliable (following through on your commitments)
- Honesty (mean what you say and say what you mean)
- Not betraying a trust
- Integrity (not caving into temptation)
- Loyalty (but only when it is appropriate)

Discussion questions

Before the video:

1. How do you know when you can trust someone?
2. Is it a bad thing to be untrustworthy? How could it hurt you?
3. In what kind of relationships is trust important and why? (i.e., family, friends, dating, school, work, etc.)

Discussion questions

After the video:

1. Adults say that your generation cannot be trusted, that you have lost the values from past generations. Do you agree or disagree?
2. Is it a good idea to risk losing your parents' trust for a temporary pleasure? In the video Clarence said, "So what if you are in trouble for a little while, it is no big deal!" Do you agree or disagree?
3. How important is trust in your personal relationships? Would these relationships be affected if you found out someone was lying to you or breaking a trust?
4. Once trust has been broken, what can you do to get it back, or can you? Have you ever lost someone's trust or has someone lost your trust? Explain.
5. If your friends were here right now, would they say you were trustworthy? What would your parents say? Should parents trust you automatically because they love you? Why or why not?
6. Students in the video identified several aspects of trustworthiness. What were they? Do you agree, or can you add any? What does trustworthiness mean to you?
7. If you want someone to trust you, who has the most of the responsibility – you or the other person? Why?
8. Dr. Mike said that your trustworthiness may be questioned but your choices will never lie. What does that mean? Do you agree?
9. As a general policy should we start off trusting people and only stop if they prove to be untrustworthy? Or should we be more cautious and not trust them until they prove themselves to be trustworthy? What are the advantages of each position?
10. How did Rosa's story make you feel? What did you learn from it?
11. Rosa said, "Trust is the basis for every relationship." Do you think that is true?

12. Rosa also said, “Your willingness to trust another person is important if you want that person to trust you.” Do you agree?
13. Why do think the Peer Resource Program at Rosa’s school used a ropes course to train peer counselors?
14. What does being trustworthy have to do with the quality of your character?
15. What are the benefits of being trustworthy person? How do you benefit from the trustworthiness of others? (Discuss the element of loyalty as it relates to trustworthiness, and when might it be inappropriate?)

Writing Assignments:

1. Are you a trustworthy person? In what ways are you trustworthy, perhaps, not so trustworthy in other ways? What might you do to improve?
2. Write an essay describing what this society might be like if nobody was trustworthy, if suspicion, dishonesty, and betrayal were the norm; if nobody could be trusted or counted on to keep commitments.
3. Write about someone you trust. Why do you trust that person? How important is that trust to you? And how do you reciprocate?
4. Keep a journal for a month that focuses on your relationships with your friends and family in the area of trustworthiness. If there are things that displease you, develop some strategies for improving the situation.
5. Write about a time you lost someone’s trust or somebody lost your trust. Was this trust ever regained? How? What did you learn from the experience?

Group Activities:

1. Have students watch a movie or read a short story, paying particular attention to the behavior of the main characters with regard to trustworthiness. Then discuss your observations (a great many plots are based on deceit).
2. Many people complain that political leaders cannot be trusted. Divide the class into to small groups have them develop a checklist for evaluating the trustworthiness of political leaders. The class might even watch C-SPAN to observe a political speech.
3. Divide the class into small groups and brainstorm do’s and don’ts for being a trustworthy person. In what ways can and do young people demonstrate trustworthiness in their communities?

Respect

Respect means:

- Treating others the way you want to be treated
- Having consideration for others
- Treating people with civility, courtesy, and dignity
- Being accepting of differences
- Solving problems without anger or violence
- Not ridiculing, embarrassing, threatening, or hurting others

Questions before the video:

1. Suppose you were driving in a traffic jam and you suddenly realized you have to cut across two lanes of bumper-to-bumper traffic to turn right at the next corner. What is the first thing you would do?
2. We often hear that young people should respect their elders, what does that mean? Does everyone deserve respect, or just people older than we are?
3. Do our parents deserve respect just because they are our parents? Teachers? Your boss?

Questions after the video:

1. What would you have done if someone tried to cut in front of you in heavy traffic without asking your permission? Why? Has seeing this video changed your mind?
2. What is road rage (an increasing problem in our society as our roads become more and more crowded), and how does it relate to respecting others? What kind of driver do you plan to become (angry, aggressive or considerate)? Can you be a considerate driver and still not feel like others are taking advantage of you?
3. "Put-downs" have become an increasing problem in our society, why? What can be done to change things?
4. How do you feel when someone judges you without knowing you or giving you a chance to be understood? How does it feel when someone calls you a name? How does it feel when someone pushes you or bumps into you and doesn't apologize?
5. Courtesy and politeness are a lot of silly nonsense - agree or disagree?
6. In the video one teen said that if someone shows you respect, you should show respect in return, do you agree? How do you feel if you treat someone with respect and they respond with rudeness? If someone insults you, should you insult them back?
7. One girl in the video makes the point that you don't have to respect everyone; you simply have to *treat* everyone with respect, what is the difference? Are there some people that do not deserve our respect? When you treat everyone with respect (no matter how they treat you) how do you feel about yourself?
8. When people stay out of a bully's way, are they showing respect? Is avoidance a good method to respond to rudeness and ugly behavior, is it the best method? What are other strategies to deal with poor behavior?
9. What are rules for respectful behavior?

10. Do you think Brian's pen-pal service is making our world a better place to live in?
11. What can we do to make our community a better place to live?
12. Does respect of others play a role in harmonious race relations?
13. Do you think people in our society are respectful enough of each other? What are the benefits of people treating each other with respect?
14. Do you consider yourself to be a respectful person? In what ways do you demonstrate respect for others?
15. How is respect related to fairness? To caring? To the Golden Rule? To violence?

Writing assignments:

1. How does government "of, by, and for the people" depend on respect? Write an essay connecting the concepts of democracy and respect. Keep in mind the following:
 - Listening to different points of view – a sign of respect and a cornerstone of democracy
 - Respect of the individual and his rights – a point of respect and a cornerstone of democracy
 - Life, liberty and happiness an individual right – a sign of respect and a cornerstone of democracy
2. Watch a comedy or sitcom on television, and then write about how the actions of the characters demonstrated either respectful or disrespectful behavior.
3. Bullies are often trying to make people "respect" them. Is this respect or fear, what is the difference? How is bullying and violent behavior an act of disrespect?
4. Write about a time when you were disrespectful to another person. Why did it happen; was it the right thing to do; what were the consequences; how did it make you and the other person feel; and finally what things do you do now that insure that you treat others with respect?
5. In the video one teen talks about the "ripple effect" (if one person treats another with respect, the respect begins to spread out from there). Write an editorial for your school newspaper encouraging students to start the "respectful ripple effect." Describe what it could accomplish in your school setting.

Group Activities:

1. Brainstorm ways to make your school environment more respectful (break into small groups and work with specific areas like in the classroom, hallways, cafeteria, gym, or sports field).
2. Divide the class into small groups and have each group develop a list of do's and don'ts for being a more respectful person.
3. Use articles from the newspaper or magazines to discuss situations in which respect or disrespect are issues. Discuss how these behaviors affect our society.

Citizenship

What is good citizenship?

- Being socially responsible – having a sense of civic responsibility
- Doing your part for the common good of your school, family, community & nation
- Making our democracy work by voicing your opinions, voting, and participating in the decision making process
- Performing community service – getting involved with your community efforts for improvement
- Helping to take care of the environment
- Obeying the laws (even when you do not agree with them) because that is the “right” thing to do

Questions before the video:

1. Agree or disagree: I don't have any responsibility to my school, my community or my nation, or anything else. My only responsibilities are to myself.
2. What is social responsibility? What does it have to do with being a good citizen?

Questions after the video:

1. What were the reasons the students in the video choose the school janitor to be their graduation speaker? Were their reasons good reasons, or not?
2. Some teens suggested that helping needy people is an important part of being a good citizen, do you agree?
3. What are the elements of good citizenship, and do you agree with them? Can you think of any others?
4. What will happen to our “rights” as citizens if we do not meet our responsibilities of citizenship? What are the benefits of being a citizen of community or nation? What are our civic responsibilities?
5. Why is it important to voice our opinions and to participate in the decision making process and vote?
6. What does good citizenship have to do with the Golden Rule? Does citizenship have anything to do with personal character?
7. What are the benefits of good citizenship and how do you benefit from the good citizenship of others?
8. Rosa Parks was guilty of poor citizenship when she refused to sit in the back of the bus because she violated the law. Under what circumstances can civil disobedience be justified, or can it? Is there a right way and a wrong way to change a law?
9. Some countries require youth to serve their country for a year or more (like our military draft system) after they finish school and before they join the workforce doing community service (something like our peace core), do you think this is good idea? Should something like this be a requirement for high school graduation?

10. What are some things in our local community that need improvement? What could be done to make these improvements? How can we get more people actively involved in their communities?

Writing Assignments:

1. Write a letter to the editor of your newspaper about a problem in your community that needs to be addressed. Lay out a plan for rectifying the problem.
2. Write a speech describing the essential balance of rights and responsibilities in our democracy. Try to convince your fellow classmates that in a democracy the preservation of our rights depends on our exercise of our civic responsibility.
3. In ancient Greece, people felt that it was important for all people to try to leave Athens better than they found it. Write an essay in which you apply this principle to your own community.
4. Identify a good citizen in your school. Write an essay describing why he or she deserves that recognition or title.
5. From a newspaper, magazine, TV show, or movie, identify an act of poor citizenship displayed by an adult. Write a letter of criticism to this person with the intention of trying to convince him or her to shape up.

Group Activities:

1. Have students plan a needed community or school service project and then implement the plan. Be sure the plan considers students, teachers, administrators, parents and anyone else that has a stake in the school or community.
2. Have the class identify individuals or organizations in your community that are making a positive difference. Work in groups to interview these people and then give class reports on how they got started, why they do what they do, and, how they have accomplished what they have.
3. Have students brainstorm a list of do's and don'ts for good citizenship. Have them to come up with school requirements for teaching this list, and strategies for reducing apathy or failure of students to complete requirements.

Responsibility

What is Responsibility?

- Doing what needs to be done – when it needs to be done (without being told)
- Being reliable and dependable
- Being accountable for your actions – not making excuses or blaming others
- Fulfilling your moral obligations
- Using good judgment and thinking through the consequences of your actions
- Exercising self-control in all areas (physical, social and emotional)

Questions before the video:

1. Why is it important to include in the definition “not being told”? Why is responsibility so personal that it does not include someone else helping you to remember or telling you what to do?
2. Is part of responsibility not only doing the “job” but having the ability to recognize the need for what must be done and then having the initiative to do the job even if it is not your job to do?
3. Have you ever heard that a man is only as good as his word? What does that mean, to you? Do you agree?

Questions after the video:

1. The teens in the video identified several aspects of responsibility, what were they? What does responsibility mean to you?
2. Do you consider it important for your friends and family members to be responsible? Why?
3. During the video Dr. Mike asked Carlos if he was willing to pay the price for being irresponsible. What did he mean, what price was he talking about?
4. Think about someone you think of as a very responsible person, does that person demonstrate the qualities we have discussed? Do you respect that person more for their choices especially the ones that make them responsible?
5. The girl who hit the parked car felt she had to report it. Why take responsibility for something nobody saw you do?
6. How does responsibility relate to the “Golden Rule”?
7. Think about the relationship between blaming others and taking responsibility. How did Dr. Mike change blaming others into a tool for teaching responsibility? Think about school and home, do you blame others for your problems?
8. Carlos thought that responsibility gave him personal strength and power, what did he mean?
9. How did Lateeah’s story make you feel? Did her story demonstrate the “power” of taking responsibility? Lateefah said her future was up to her, what did she mean? Why is it important for each of us to take responsibility for the direction that our life takes?

10. It has been said that: “There are no rights without responsibility, and there is no responsibility without rights.” What does that mean and do you agree? What does this have to do with citizenship?
11. It is commonly said that you can’t control what happens to you or what life puts at your door-step but you have complete control over how you react or respond to it. What does this mean and how does it apply to your responsibility and your character?
12. What are the benefits of being a responsible person? How do you benefit from the responsibility of others?

Writing Assignments:

1. Write an essay about personal responsibility and include responsibilities to yourself, your family, your friends, your community and the world.
2. Write an essay about the relationship between your age and level of responsibility. How do responsibilities differ for people your age and for older adults? How has your “sense” of responsibility changed as you have gotten older? At what age should we become totally responsible and accountable for our own actions?
3. Describe what this society might be like if no one was accountable for their actions, if nobody kept their commitments and no one acted responsibly.
4. Write at least five things you could say to yourself when you are tempted to act irresponsibly. Explain the meaning and significance of each.

Group Activities:

1. Have students visit our website www.goodcharacter.com where they will find opportunities to become involved in activities and issues relating to personal and social responsibility.
2. Have several students search for the word “responsibility” on the Internet. Make a list of resources. Then create a Responsibility Web Page with links to these resources for your school website.
3. Role play: You’ve made a commitment to spend this weekend working on your part of a class project that is due Monday. Then, some friends invite you to go on a weekend camping trip in the mountains. You can’t do both, so you decide to go on the trip. Try to explain your decision to the other people in the group project. Then have the class discuss the interaction.
4. Divide the class into small groups, with each group developing a list of do’s and don’ts for being responsible. Have the class discuss what happens when people live in accordance with these guidelines and when they don’t. How does this affect our community and society? In what ways can young people make an impact and demonstrate personal responsibility?

Fairness

Everyone wants to be treated with “fairness,” what is fairness?

- Treat others the way you want to be treated (Golden Rule)
- Treat people equally and impartially
- Consider the feelings of all people who will be affected by your actions
- Be-open minded (listen to what others say and be reasonable)
- Play by the rules (laws and ethical behavior)
- Don't take advantage of others or use others to make gains for yourself

Questions before the video:

1. “It is an unfair world and no matter what I do or say nothing is going to change that. Life just isn't fair!” Agree or disagree? Is it ok to not be treated fairly in some situations?
2. How do you know when something is unfair?

Questions after the video:

1. What does treating people fairly mean? Does fairness mean everyone gets the same amount, like an equal piece of a chocolate bar? Does fairness mean enforcing the rules for everyone, even if it means losing a game? Is it possible to treat everyone exactly the same or fairly?
2. In the video one kid said that fairness involves putting yourself in the other person's shoes. Is this true? How is it possible to do that? What does the Golden Rule have to do with fairness?
3. What does it mean to be open-minded? What does it mean to be impartial?
4. Is it possible to be fair without considering everyone who will be affected by your decision?
5. What does the word “tolerance” have to do with fairness?
6. Most people think fairness requires us to treat people equally. What does it mean to treat people equally? Does it mean treating everyone the same?
7. Can you think of a situation in which it might be the right thing to do to give someone a special advantage? Are there ever good reasons to give unequal treatment or unequal consequences for the same offense?
8. What if being fair to others means sacrificing something important to of your own, like time, money, friendship, or even your job? How can you determine what's fair when you have to choose between yourself and others?
9. How should you treat people who are not fair with you? (Tennis is a good example.)
10. How did the Craig Kielburger story make you feel? What did you learn from it?
11. Do you agree with Craig that, “Once we realize a problem exists, it's a call for action”? What kinds of actions did Craig take? Is it realistic to think the average teenager can take meaningful action, or is Craig just a special case?

12. Craig felt every person is born with a special gift. What gifts do you have that could be used to bring about more justice in our world?
13. What do you think Aristotle meant when he said, “All virtue is summed up in dealing justly”? Do you agree with him? Do you think can be just all the time?
14. How do you benefit from being a “fair” person? How do you benefit from the fairness of others? What does this have to do with personal character?
15. Did the video present any ideas you disagreed with?

Writing Assignments:

1. Think of a time when you have taken unfair advantage of a person or a situation, or when someone has taken unfair advantage of you. Describe it. What was unfair about it? How did it make you feel? What did you learn from the experience?
2. Write an essay on Fairness, how it relates to respect, honesty, being reliable and being a good citizen?
3. Craig Kieburger has written a book about his experiences called “Free the Children.” It is a very powerful, inspiring and beautifully written book. Have your students read it and write a book report.
4. Describe an injustice in your school in your school or community and what you think should be done about it.
5. Research and write about how the legal system in a democracy attempts to administer fairness or justice. What are the elements of the legal system that are designed to make justice work?

Group Activities:

1. Have your class set up a situation in which you have to make an important decision (for instance, choosing someone for a job). Dr. Mike said that to make a fair decision you have to consider all the stakeholders (all the people affected directly or indirectly by your decision). Are there more stakeholders than just the two applicants, how can you tell who has a stake in your decision? How does considering the stakeholders help you make a fairer decision? Discuss.
2. Invite a judge to come and talk with your class about how he/she makes a fair decision in the courtroom. A teacher? The Principal?
3. Bring in articles from the newspapers or a magazine describing situations in which fairness and justice is an issue. Decide who is acting fairly, and who is acting unfairly in these situations.
4. One aspect of fairness is equal opportunity, do a research study in your school to see if students feel that they all have equal opportunities. Are there groups of students who don't think they do? Consider race, class, sex, gender, or age in your study. Is there a group of “outcasts” in your school who feel that they're being treated unfairly? What could be done to address these complaints? Share the results of the study with the staff, administration and other students.

5. Divide the class into small groups have each group brainstorm a list of unfair practices in these various areas: (Personal lives, in society, in school, families, the local community, etc.) Have each group address the following: What could be done to rectify these injustices; whose responsibility is it to correct the injustices in our society; how could you contribute to these efforts; how could we do a better job in our personal lives to improve justice?

Caring

What does it mean to be caring?

- Being responsive to the concerns and needs of others
- Treating others with kindness, concern, manners, and generosity
- Being charitable
- Giving of yourself for the benefit of others
- Not being rude, mean, cruel or insensitive to others

Questions before the video:

1. Many today say that teenagers are self absorbed and don't care about anything but themselves. Do you agree or disagree?
2. My mother always said, "Take care of yourself - because if you don't, no one else will." Do you think that taking care of yourself means you must disregard the needs of others?
3. I have always heard be careful of who you step on – on the way up the ladder, because they are the same people you will meet on the way down. What does that mean?

Questions after the video:

1. How do you feel when people show that they really care about you? How do you feel when you do something really caring for someone else?
2. In what ways is this a caring world? In what ways is it uncaring? What are some things that each of us could do to make this a more caring world?
3. Is it just uncool to be a caring individual in our society today?
4. When someone is uncaring how does that affect friends, family, school, community, and the world?
5. To what extent would you inconvenience yourself for another person?
6. Do you agree with the student who suggested that caring means putting ourselves second? Is it maybe not all about us?
7. Would you give money to a stranger on the street who asked for spare change? Why or why not? Would it make a difference if the person were a mother with a child, very old, from a different culture, a different race? What does giving money to a stranger have to do with caring anyway?
8. At the beginning of the program Dr. Mike read a letter from Benjy, who said he had learned that listening was a greater act of caring than throwing coins in a cup. Why do you think he felt that way?
9. How could Dr. Mike's advice about listening help solve Roberto's problem?
10. Do you agree with Gillian that "everyone can make a difference?"

11. Can you choose to be a caring person and then change yourself by changing your behaviors? If so, how could you become a more caring person? By performing caring acts can we become caring people?
12. One student said, "Caring needs a government that works." In our country, do government programs show caring for people in need? Or do we just throw money at the problems?
13. Do you think we can pass laws that will make people care about one another? Why or why not?
14. Explain the quote from Gibran, "You give little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give."
15. What does caring have to do with your character?

Writing Assignments:

1. Describe the most caring thing that anyone has ever done for you. What effect did that have on you and who you are today?
2. Dr. Mike reported having a student say, "I didn't ask to be born. I don't owe anybody anything. Why should I care about you? Why should I care about anyone? Write an essay commenting on this attitude.
3. Write a thank you note to someone in your community who did something very caring. Or, write a thank you note to a historic figure, for instance, Florence Nightingale, to thank her for what she did.
4. Write about a real or imagined experience in which you performed a random act of caring, and the results it produced.
5. Imagine that you have just inherited a huge sum of money and you want to spend it all to help others. What would you do with it and why?
6. Use a short story, movie or TV program and then write about how the actions of the characters demonstrated caring or uncaring behaviors. Write a critique of an uncaring character, suggesting how he or she could have been a more caring person.

Group Activities:

1. Brainstorm ways to make your school environment more caring. Create a list of recommendations, and place them in your school newspaper or on a poster. Find a way to deal with the cynics who will sneer at the whole idea.
2. Write two headings on the blackboard: Caring and Uncaring. Take turns listing things under these headings. Then discuss what kind of efforts it would take to move all the items from the uncaring column into the caring column.
3. Have the class or groups plan a service project. Consider helping younger children learn something valuable or going and visiting senior citizens (something that demonstrates caring). Do you think teenagers can make a real impact on their communities?